



WASHINGTON STATE LEGISLATURE

November 19, 2019

Lara Henderson, Water Quality
TMDL Program Planner
Department of Ecology, Headquarters

Dear Ms. Henderson:

As legislators from Southwest Washington, we write to urge the Department of Ecology to elevate Vancouver Lake and its tributaries to a high priority in the current TDML process.

Vancouver Lake was designated a 303(d) Category 5 water body in 2004. We understand that to mean that the Lake is among those bodies of water in Washington that have the worst water quality. The water quality problems in the Lake, however, long predate the 2004 designation and the Lake has had numerous studies conducted on its water quality going back to the 1960's. It appears that Vancouver Lake has not been elevated for high priority in State funding due to multiple public entities with ownership interests in the Lake but without a clear advocate. It is our understanding that the Department of Natural Resources is the owner of the lakebed and surface waters and exercises regulatory authority over water related uses on the Lake. The Port of Vancouver acknowledges ownership of tidelands around the Lake but apparently cannot, at this time, delineate the specific location of those tidelands. Clark County operates a large regional park on the west side of the Lake which includes a major recreational swimming beach.

The Lake provides a myriad of recreational amenities to the citizens of our community including swimming, sailing, kayaking and competitive rowing. The rowing events attract thousands of local participants and visitors each year. Annual regattas, dragon boat races and similar events are very popular and contribute to the area's economy.

At 2300 acres, Vancouver Lake is one of the largest bodies of water in this part of the State. In addition, it is a refuge for migratory waterfowl and has identified salmonids including chum, chinook and steelhead as part of the fish population. The Lake provides a significant environmental amenity not only for this community but for all Southwest Washington.

All the above-named recreational amenities are threatened by the degraded water quality. The persistent outbreaks of blue-green algae have cancelled major rowing events every year in recent memory. 2019 had one of the earliest algae outbreaks resulting in periodic closures of the Lake not only for rowing and watersports but also for recreational swimming during the summer months. To compound the problem, Eurasian Milfoil was identified in the Lake in 2017 and has grown exponentially since then not only threatening all recreational activities but posing dangerous conditions for swimmers and those engaging in watersports.


Our delegation recently met with a local nonprofit, Friends of Vancouver Lake, that was formed in 2018 primarily to combat the milfoil invasion. Their efforts resulted in significant community support to deal with the milfoil threat, but they also recognize that the long-term water quality issues are at the heart of the invasive weed problem and the persistent blue green algae threat.

We fully support and encourage the efforts to elevate Vancouver Lake and its tributaries on the State's priority list for both a formal TDML study and appropriate funding for a water improvement plan and we ask the Department of Ecology to recognize that this long neglected water body deserves much needed State support.

Sincerely,



Senator Annette Cleveland



Senator Ann Rivers



Rep. Sharon Wylie



Rep. Paul Harris



Rep. Monica Stonier



Rep. Larry Hoff

C: Hon. Gov. Jay Inslee
Maia Bellon, Director, Department of Ecology
Clark County Council
Shawn Hennessee, Clark County Manager
Kevin Tyler, Clark County Lands Manager
Port of Vancouver Commissioners
Juliana Marler, Executive Director, Port of Vancouver
Mayor Ann McEnery-Ogle, City of Vancouver
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